

The Reach of Song

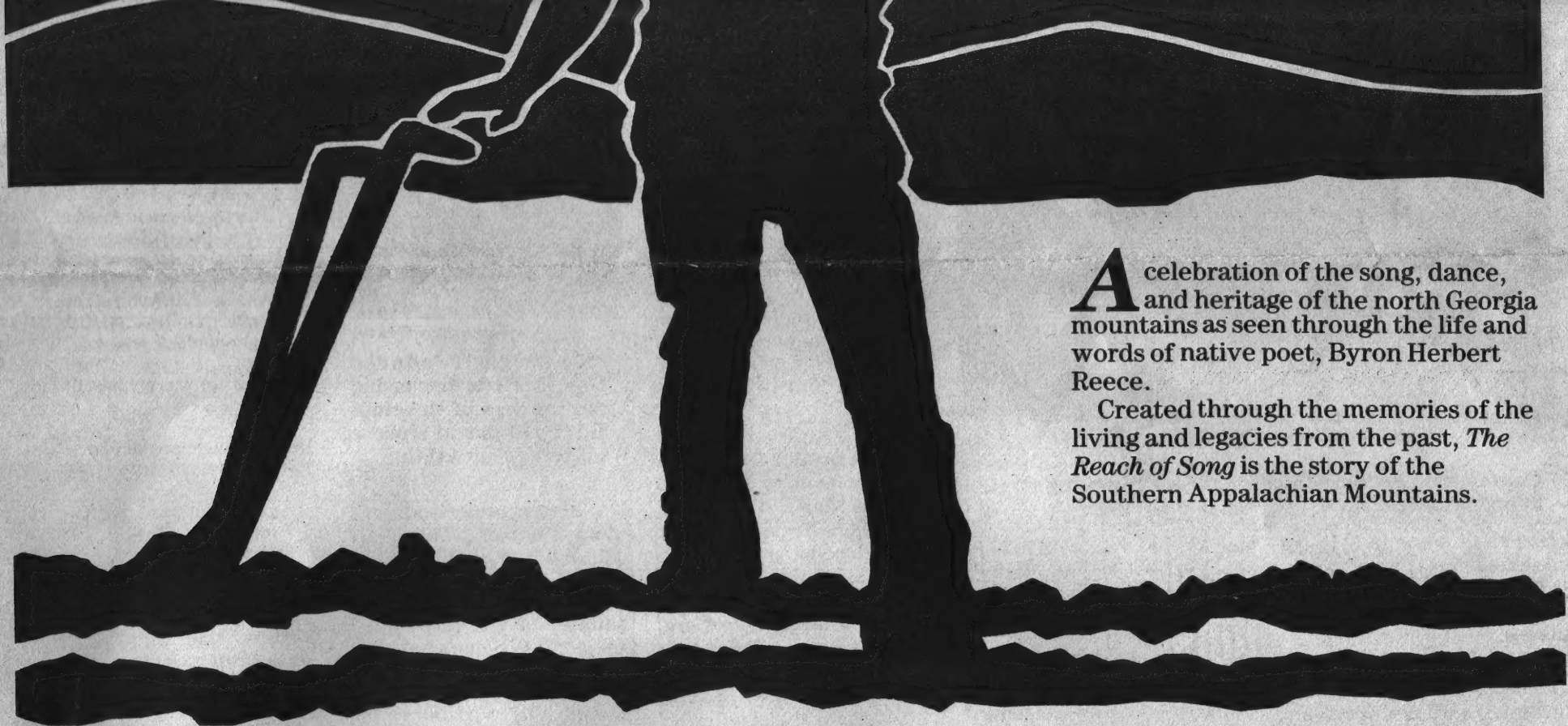
(1989)

an Appalachian Drama



A celebration of the song, dance, and heritage of the north Georgia mountains as seen through the life and words of native poet, Byron Herbert Reece.

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PREMIERE SEASON

June 20 - July 29

Tuesday thru Saturday

1989

8 P.M. ANDERSON MUSIC HALL

GEORGIA MOUNTAIN FAIRGROUND

HIAWASSEE, GA.

TICKETS: Hiawassee 404/896-3388

Gainesville 404/536-3431

The Academy Theatre in Atlanta 404/892-0880

A PLAYWRIGHT'S SAGA

by Tom DeTitta

This show began with a Sunday choir; or maybe it began with a poem read on a quiet summer night; perhaps it started after hearing a story as well crafted as it was untrue. It's hard to say. But, at some point, the joys of living in the mountains and inspiration of Byron Herbert Reece's words started a momentum that today has become "The Reach of Song".

Although it was a momentum that started within me, it soon became one which I could barely keep up with. For the two years of research in the mountains, I asked for ideas and received photos, insights, recollections and memories. There isn't a moment in the play that can't be directly

"Decoration Day" and dinner on the ground came out of suggestions from one workshop; and the scenes surrounding the electrification of the mountains took shape through other workshop conversations. Scripts were written and ideas tested onstage with the other participants. Changes were made until we got it right.

But even before the workshops began, many people had taken a keen interest in the dramatic presentation of their mountain culture and mountain poet Hub Reece.

Local composer Rudy Davenport and his sister, Playwright Delilah Davenport Elsen, helped me to understand how lonely it can be between the ridges

view of mountain living.

In pouring through revision after script revision, area writers Jimmy and Roxanne Powell made sure the dialogue stayed in the mountains. They, along with Truman Barrett and Robin Mauney, made sure the play's emphasis stayed on track — while the latter person made sure the playwright remained on track as well.

Pam Kelly traced through her family and friends to find out how the folks of yesteryear got by without the help of doctors and modern medicine.

Zell Miller recalled the things that soldiers brought home upon returning from the Second World War. His recollections of the tall tales he heard growing up in the mountains helped inspire the dialogue around the whittler's bench and the quilter's group.

Cast members James Farist, Ezra Davenport, Howard Cunningham, Zura Todd, David Hyatt, Hubbie Hyatt and others have watched scenes change before their eyes based on the memories precipitated by rehearsals. James remembered a dismissal song at the end of prayer meeting, and so we developed one in the script.

Those who knew the poet gave all they could to ensure that his memory remained

her house to school each morning.

Especially important and inspirational has been the time and interest of family members. Without the memories, photos and letters from sisters Kate and Jean, brother T.J., and Terry, Patti and other nieces and nephews, I could never have felt secure writing a play involving Byron Herbert Reece. Without having felt their longing, all the information I had collected would have meant even less.



photo by Sandy Weaver

Playwright/Producer Tom DeTitta discussing the process of developing the drama at a press conference in Atlanta.



Silhouette art by Jimmy Powell

Poems from the Poet's Family

Colby Glen

*In Memory of
Byron Herbert Reece*

As I came down through Colby
Glen
With mark of Autumn on the
bough
I thought of other seasons
when
Much lighter was my heart
than now

Bereft of company of one
Who loved the beauty of the
wood



photo by Sam Alworth

that can't be directly can be between the ridges



photo by Sam Alworth

Choreographer Dee Wagner and a storytelling circle at one of the early Drama Workshops.

traced to something someone told me. There are more — far more — people in this play than just the characters.

It would be impossible to name all those who contributed to the script. Many came to the three weekend workshops through this past winter and spring. These were designed so folks could be a part of the process of developing the script, while also learning a thing or two about acting, in preparation for the upcoming drama.

It was there Zura Todd brought her lye soap and butter churns — both electric and handheld. There Mrs. Joyce Holmes brought the pictures of servicemen that hung on the wall of her church, and which are now projected in the play as a reminder of those who fought in the Second World War.

The scenes depicting

for artists who strain to hear their own voices. Rudy's musical composition of Byron Herbert Reece's "Now in the Heart" remains in "The Reach of Song" as his tribute to the poet and kindred spirit who often inspired Davenport's musical interests.

If J. William Denton hadn't met with the creative staff one day at his insurance office, the play wouldn't have contained a cobweb supper.

If I hadn't caught him one Friday night eating chicken at a local restaurant, Honest Homer and his traveling carnival would have moved just a little bit closer to being forgotten.

J. William, his sister Elois Anderson, Terry Taylor and Joe Satterfield all took several hours of their Saturday afternoons to sit down with the people involved with the show and give them a general over-

view heard growing up in the mountains helped inspire the dialogue around the whittler's bench and the quilter's group.

Cast members James Farist, Ezra Davenport, Howard Cunningham, Zura Todd, David Hyatt, Hubbie Hyatt and others have watched scenes change before their eyes based on the memories precipitated by rehearsals. James remembered a dismissal song at the end of prayer meeting, and so we developed one in the script.

Those who knew the poet gave all they could to ensure that his memory remained true to fact. Dale Elliot remembers looking to the sky with his boyhood buddy Hub Reece and trying to figure out ways they could fly like Charles Lindberg. Mildred Greear knew that beneath the poet's reticent exterior lay a wave of excitement for the simplest of mountain joys: a fiddle, red flowering crepe myrtle, the service tree. Phillip Greear recognized and understood the genius in his college buddy before most had.

Dr. Sam F. Dayton, a former student of Reece's at Young Harris College, recalled that the poet would always seem as though he were absolutely alone in a room filled with a hundred people — thus describing the loneliness of genius that was to overrun the poet's existence.

Reece's former elementary school teacher, Dora Spivey, adjusted the stance of our actor until he looked like the former student she saw walking past



photo by Sandy Weaver

Playwright/Producer Tom DeTitta discussing the process of developing the drama at a press conference in Atlanta.

I better understood this momentum of "The Reach of Song" while Jack Lance was fielding customers behind the prescription counter of the Rite Aid in Blairsville. Somewhere between penicillin and cough syrup, we realized that it would be virtually impossible for me to see as much change in my lifetime as he saw in his 50 or so years growing up in the mountains.

At its best, theatre can be a healing mechanism, a way of seeing, perhaps making sense of that which happened so suddenly.

I am not a mountain native. Six years ago, I was looking for a quiet place to finish a book and was immediately held by what Reece described as the "Hughly Hills."

Like the poet, "I have been driven by the desire to preserve what I have enjoyed — intact — for others to enjoy."

Poet's Family

Colby Glen

*In Memory of
Byron Herbert Reece*

As I came down through Colby Glen
With mark of Autumn on the bough
I thought of other seasons when
Much lighter was my heart than now

Bereft of company of one
Who loved the beauty of the wood
When autumn's artistry was done
Now I must walk in solitude

And though the poplar's golden leaf
Is mirrored still in Pindar Lake
The heart recalls a new-made grief
In joy, slow now to awake

As I came down through Colby Glen
Mid beauty of the fall of year
I thought of other seasons when
My loved one too would linger here.

Jean Rispoli
sister of
Byron Herbert Reece

SOUNDS

Listen — can you
Hear it in the wind?
That winsome voice of long ago
Rising — falling with the wind,
Calling to be heard once more.

Patti Rispoli
niece of
Byron Herbert Reece



**From the
Executive Director
Dr. Sam F. Dayton
Georgia Mountains
Area Planning and
Development
Commission**

"The Reach of Song" Opening June 20 is the culmination of a three-year research, planning and development effort by people and organizations both inside and outside the Southern Appalachian region. Some shared memories, historical information and recommended additional resources. Others shared financial resources, in-kind gifts, volunteer time and energy. There are a number of people

who gave on each of these levels to help us get into this Premiere Season.

They are each — civic or government organization, business or individual — the real joy of this endeavor. They are the impetus behind the realization of this regional mountain presentation.

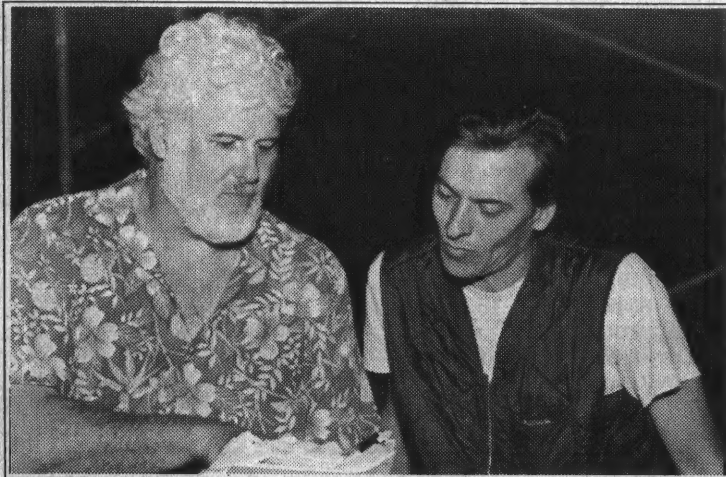
We hope for the reward of sharing this opening season with visitor and native alike. And, for the future we are both hoping and planning for

"The Reach of Song" to provide opportunities throughout the region — for sharing our unique heritage in both cultural and economic development.

This is, then, a time to say: "Thank You" and to issue an invitation: "Join us at Anderson Music Hall between June 20 and July 29 for the Premiere Season of 'The Reach of Song'."

Sam F. Dayton, Ph.D.
Executive Director

GETTING THE PLAY UNDERWAY



EDDIE LEE

photo by Russ Youngblood

BRINGING FORTH THE STORY

Local actors and performers sing the songs, play the tunes and tell the tales they have heard for years in the mountains of North Georgia.

AMONG ATLANTA'S FINEST

Theatre professionals bring to the mountains the excitement and technique of the live stage. At left, Director Eddie Lee discusses the script with Atlanta actor James Mayberry. Lee and Co-director Rebecca Wackler bring their noted brand of dynamic staging to the production. Music Director Phillip DePoy (right) has created symphonic recordings of traditional tunes and has arranged live gospel, dance, choir and a cappella ballads for the production. Choreographer Dee Wagner (below) resurrects the traditional mountain flat-dancing, buck dancing and round dancing of yesterday.



photo by Sandy Weaver





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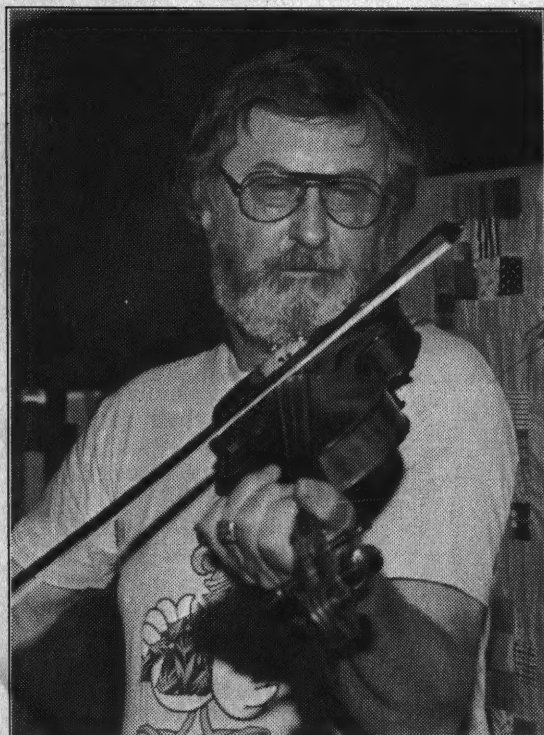


photo by Russ Youngblood

Atlanta Country Music Hall of Fame fiddler Howard Cunningham (above) and Georgia Mountain Fair Fiddler King Ross Brown (far right) headline the group of area musicians which also includes guitarist Clinton Carter, banjo pickers J.D. Robinson and Barry Palmer, violinist James Farist.



photo by Sandy Weaver

Mrs. Zura Gooch Todd, a native of Union County and now a Dahlonega resident, is making her acting debut at 84 years of age with "The Reach of Song."

NATIVE OF UNION COUNTY GA.

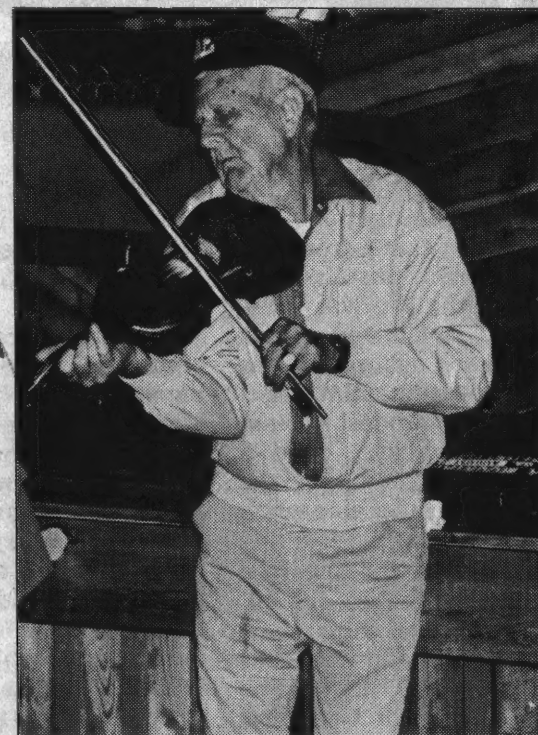


photo by Sandy Weaver

Ross Brown (above) was selected Fiddler King at the 1988 Georgia Mountain Fair Fiddler's Convention.

SUMMER 1989 AT
HIAWASSEE, GA.

A MAN AND HIS MOUNTAINS

by Roxanne Powell

In the cool, tumbling waters that never sleep, at the foot of drowsy hills in a land named by the Indians "Choestoe" (cho-e-sto-e), a man once lived and worked and grew. An ordinary man in outward appearance, but a man extraordinary to the inward eye where the heart and mind decipher the poetry of life itself.

Byron Herbert Reece loved his native North Georgia mountain land of Choestoe, which translated means, "land of the dancing rabbits." In the shadow of rhododendron-covered mountainsides, the mountain farmer and poet found the inspiration to push both plow and pen with a will almost beyond the limits of mortal men.

If Byron Herbert Reece committed his heart to anything, it was Choestoe.

else. Like Reece, I've breathed Choestoe's dust into my lungs and taken it deep, as he did, into the roots of my soul.

Byron Herbert Reece was a man firmly planted in this rich earth, a man who reached for the clouds, asking nothing less, nothing more.

He was an artist who sculpted the rusty Choestoe clay with his plough, the written word of his heart's ponderings with his pen, and made the mold of men's minds in ways that others could not.

He knew there were many things in the larger world outside his Choestoe homeland that he had never seen, but he did not care. He knew Choestoe and knew her well. That was enough.

Reece knew, as I do, that Choestoe has a face. It is



Byron Herbert Reece
photo courtesy of
Young Harris College Library,
Young Harris, Ga.

She has a personality that she reveals to those who would know her, who enter her shrine with respect.

To know, to think, to feel fully with one's whole heart and mind the breadth and depth and height of Choestoe on a still, moonlit night, or in the permeating warmth of sultry, wavering heat of a southern summer wafting off the fields toward the mountain shade, was the hope, the dream, the vision of Byron Herbert Reece.

While Reece's mortal life is gone, the unseen seeds he planted so many years ago can live and grow and bloom again with a new vigor, a new life.

By partaking of the literary legacy that he left behind, we can resurrect the extraordinary man that Byron Herbert Reece was, and, through his writings born in the shadow of his beloved Choestoe, we, too, can live and laugh and love and learn of earth.

"The Reach of Song"
is produced by

Standard Telephone Makes Gift For Music To "The Reach of Song"

Standard Telephone Company, serving clients in nine northeast Georgia counties, has chosen to serve a new community endeavor for the region. The music for the Drama has been provided through an \$8,800 Corporate Benefactor gift from the communications company.

This sponsorship provides for original score, compositions and the services of Phillip DePoy, a professional musical director for the show.

Company President Dean Swanson stated: "The Drama will be an excellent expression of the abundant musical literary heritage of the Georgia Mountains."

"Moreover," he continues, "the play will serve as a valuable resource for preserving the rich culture of our area. Standard Telephone Company is proud to play a small role in this exciting production."

"Standard Telephone Company has 85 years of

service to our region. Dean Swanson and the company leadership has a keen understanding of the characteristics and history of this service area; and they have, again, demonstrated their corporate citizenship with this gift," commented Dr. Sam F. Dayton, Executive Director.

"This special sponsorship has given a vital boost to our goals of establishing an annual event of regional and national importance in the arts and in adding economic opportunities through our area," Dayton added.



Georgia Mountain Fair, Inc., Towns County Lions Are First Civic Patrons For Area Drama

Long recognized as astute and promotion-minded supporters of mountain heritage and economic growth, the Georgia Mountain Fair, Inc. and its parent organization, the Towns County Lions Club, are the hosts for "The Reach of Song".

"They are the initial community benefactors for the show," said Dr. Sam F. Dayton, Executive Director

is a most generous, supportive gift," he added.

When the 1989 Georgia Mountain Fair opens on August 2, Anderson Music Hall will begin its second decade as the site of mountain music events.

In 1990 the Lions and the Fair will celebrate their 40th anniversary of service to home-folks and visitors. The first Fair in 1950 was a rustic agricultural fair non-



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Silhouette Art by Jimmy Powell

For Reece, life, land and love were inseparable entities. Life came from the land and was sustained by it; when the life was gone, the land swallowed a man up into itself again, fulfilling him, elevating him, perhaps, to his grandest station. The land always loved a man, Reece knew, for the land would take him when no one else would.

Reece's love for Choestoe is a kindred feeling for all, like myself, who were raised up in the shadow of her lofty peaks that have strained since the beginning to grasp the sky.

I never knew Byron Herbert Reece personally, but Choestoe knew him, as she knows me. I have wiped the same dusty earth from my hands at the end of a day of working her soil with a sweat born of will and little

there as surely as her red clay soil packs beneath the foot today, just as it did under Reece's foot so many years ago.

Choestoe's tree-shrouded waters still course their path along the Nottely's riverbed and Wolf Creek's depths, flowing from the bowels of time itself, not worrying if a river can flow forever without going dry.

As they did in the time when the world was new, Choestoe's mountains sit mute, immovable, a silent testament to eternity. They close their eyes at dusk and wink themselves awake in the stirring dawn that lifts their mantles of fog wisps, much as they did when Byron Herbert Reece farmed alongside the cold waters of Wolf Creek.

Choestoe is a living entity as much as any place can be.

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While Reece's mortal life is gone, the unseen seeds he planted so many years ago can live and grow and bloom again with a new vigor, a new life.

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P.O. Box 1720
Gainesville, GA 30503

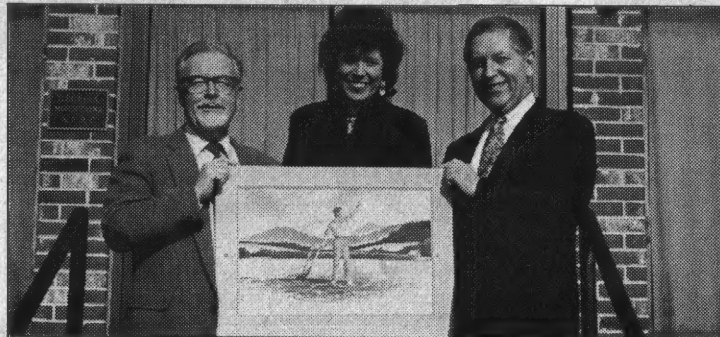


photo by Nancy Addison

Clarkesville artist John Kollock has added his distinctive support to "The Reach of Song". Mr. Kollock expanded a two-color schematic logo into a new dramatic dimension: watercolor of native poet and farmer, Byron Herbert Reece, caught in a moment of reverie in the midst of plowing a valley field. Mr. Kollock's watercolor is a special illustration for printed Drama materials including brochures and posters. He has also done a series of pen and ink sketches for the project. Artist, historian, researcher, Habersham County native John Kollock has been giving a personal impetus to mountain projects for more than 20 years. Shown above L to R: Mr. Kollock, GMAPDC Art Director Beth Rayfield, Dr. Sam F. Dayton.

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"They are the initial community benefactors for the show," said Dr. Sam F. Dayton, Executive Director for the Drama. "Anderson Music Hall at the Fair-ground has been made available, rent-free, for rehearsals and the play's six-week Premiere Season, June 20 through July 29. It

is a most generous, supportive gift," he added.

When the 1989 Georgia Mountain Fair opens on August 2, Anderson Music Hall will begin its second decade as the site of mountain music events.

In 1990 the Lions and the Fair will celebrate their 40th anniversary of service to home-folks and visitors. The first Fair in 1950 was a rustic agricultural fair, non-commercial and non-profit, displaying mountain products and an annual flower show. The site was the Towns County High School grounds.

From that first effort which drew 7,000 visitors, the Fair has grown to a nationally-known event which now draws 125,000 guests during its 12-day August run. Lions Club members and their families still provide 95% of the 200 volunteers who work the Fair each year.

Incorporated in 1952, the Fair also added country music and in 1960 began offering area arts and crafts. By 1978 the August mountain celebration included restored heritage buildings with demonstrating craftsmen and had moved to the 160-acre Towns County Recreation Park on Lake Chatuge.

Currently, the Georgia Mountain Fair, Inc. also presents an April through October schedule of country music concerts and special festivals.